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Serving from the top

Ronald J. Winter '81 has ambitious plans as newly elected national leader of Phi Alpha Delta



Recruiting law students, left to right: Mike Ellman '13, Henry Zomerfeld '14, Allison Bozinski '13, Ronald J. Winter '81, Jamella James '15 and Ken Bostick '13.

As he takes over the highest leadership position in the nationwide legal fraternity Phi Alpha Delta, in a sense Ronald J. Winter '81 has come full circle.

He joined the organization as a first-year law student, and in his first post-Law School job – “a week after I took the bar exam,” he says – he traveled the nation on behalf of Phi Alpha Delta, visiting law schools, troubleshooting problems and talking up the fraternity’s mission of “service to the law student, law school, community and profession.”

Now he will serve for two years as International Justice – equivalent to board chairman – after winning election at Phi Alpha Delta’s biennial convention in Scottsdale, Ariz., in August.

“It’s the culmination of a lifetime of involvement with Phi Alpha Delta which began at UB’s Law School 34 years ago when I was initiated,” says Winter, who serves as principal law clerk to New York State Court of Claims Judge Richard C. Kloch Sr. in Lockport. “Never in a million years would I have

dreamed I would end up holding the gavel.”

Since those early years, he has served the organization on the regional level, and was first elected to the board in 1994.

Phi Alpha Delta is the largest law fraternity in the world and the second-largest legal organization in the United States, after the American Bar Association. It has chapters throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico and Puerto Rico – at 206 ABA-accredited law schools, over 300 undergraduate colleges and universities, and in 90 communities worldwide. The Buffalo chapter was organized in 1968 and is named in honor of Carlos C. Alden, the fourth dean.

“The focus of our law school chapters is to complement or supplement the education of our law students by adding a more practical component, providing them with some hands-on education with regards to legal practice,” Winter says. An important part of that work is helping students with job networking;

“the personal attention that we can provide our members through our alumni network is really second to none,” he says.

As International Justice, Winter says he wants to recruit 6,000 new law student members during the upcoming academic year; enhance the fraternity’s Web site; encourage greater use of the alumni network; and find a new headquarters for the organization, which sold its Baltimore office building this summer.

The fraternity’s networking capabilities are even more important, Winter says, in today’s difficult legal employment market. “The days of getting into law school, graduating and being set as an attorney are behind us,” he says. “There has been an upheaval in the belief that a law degree guaranteed long-term employment. We see attorneys being laid off, and certainly the young graduates are competing in the job market with people who have experience.”

Phi Alpha Delta is working to help law students expand their vision of the kinds of jobs in which they can use their legal skills, he says, adding, “Enhancing their marketable skills and increasing the network of contacts within our profession is what this fraternity is all about.”

And for established lawyers, he says, “it’s important to play an active role in guiding our law students and young attorneys on their path. They should find an outlet that they’re passionate about. In my case, all along it’s been Phi Alpha Delta. I believe wholeheartedly in its mission of service to the law student, law school, community and profession.”